

Samuel Heister

AN

O R A T I O N,

PRONOUNCED JULY 4, 1808,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE SELECTMEN OF THE TOWN OF
BOSTON,

IN COMMEMORATION

OF THE

ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

.....

BY **Andrew Ritchie, JUN. ESQ.**

.....

*O socii (neque enim ignari sumus ante malorum)
O passi graviora! dabit Deus quoque finem....VIRG.*

The yearly course, that brings this day about,
Shall never see it but a holy-day.....SHAK.

The Second Edition.

FROM THE PRESS OF



1808.

VOTE OF THE TOWN.

At a meeting of the freeholders and other inhabitants of the town of *Boston*, duly qualified and legally warned, in public town-meeting, assembled at Faneuil-Hall, the 4th day of July, A. D. 1808. On motion voted, That the selectmen be, and hereby are appointed a committee to wait on ANDREW RITCHIE, jun. esq. in the name of the town, and thank him for the elegant and spirited Oration, this day delivered by him, at the request of the town, upon the Anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America; and to request of him a copy for the press.

attest, WILLIAM COOPER, Town-Clerk.

BOSTON, JULY 4, 1808.

GENTLEMEN,

I submit the Oration to your disposal.

and am, with great respect,

your humble servant,

ANDREW RITCHIE, jr.

THE SELECTMEN OF BOSTON.

ORATION.

WE devote this anniversary, fellow-citizens, to the celebration of those principles, which incited our patriots in their progress to independence. The early history of our country presents the interesting view of men leaving their paternal shores in quest of a retreat from religious persecution. They found it only in a land covered with savages; and those, whom famine and the tomahawk of the indian had spared, at length acquired the glory of spreading civilization through a wilderness. A few years saw the infant colony increase to the size of a nation; and the parent country in return for the protection she extended, was satisfied with the monopoly of our trade. But, when infatuation so far possessed the British ministry, as to make them persist in the project of raising a revenue in America, and the contest became so rancorous, that the alternative was freedom or subjugation, then, thanks to Heaven, the fathers of our revolution severed the ties of our colonial dependence, and proclaimed us free, sovereign and independent states.

Here, let us not attempt to arouse feelings of revenge by recounting the deeds of cruelty which marked the progress of our enemies.—The conflict naturally had all the ferocity of civil war. But to us, who were conquerors, is reserved the glory of extending the mantle of forgiveness over the injustice of the vanquished. The spirits of our fallen heroes call not from their tombs for revenge ; nor do they require us to renew the contest, and appease them by the slaughter of thousands. But they do conjure us by all the horrors of our revolution, by the conflagration of our towns, and the ravages of our fields, by the sufferings of the captive, and the torrents of blood which flowed for our sakes, not to abandon the principles of national independence. We are not required, like young Hannibal, to approach the altar, and vow eternal hatred to a rival nation ; but we will repair to the neighboring heights, at once the tombs and everlasting monuments of our heroes, and swear, that as they did, so would we rather sacrifice our lives than our country.

The quality, which in those days distinguished our countrymen, was their sensibility to the invasion of the public immunities and honor. They were not impelled by a spirit of disloyalty ; for they did not assume the language of independence, till they had exhausted that of sup-

plication. They did not renounce their allegiance, till their monarch became their enemy. When this connection was dissolved, they rejoiced to become peaceable citizens of a free government, enjoying the tranquillity of subordination without its oppressions. Why then is the character of our revolution disgraced, by being compared in its principle with that of the French? Theirs was commenced by usurpation of the rights of a monarch, who was willing to cooperate with his subjects in any species of reasonable reform; it was continued by rival parties, who drenched their country in blood; and it was ended by a man whose pastime is desolation, and whose government is dread. In our revolution the rays of royal authority with threatening aspect gradually descended in the west; and though darkness and convulsions succeeded, we were at length cheered with the dawning light of liberty and joy. But in France there succeeded the blackness of polar darkness, illumined only by the coruscations of transient factions, till at length the whole hemisphere gleamed with the blaze of a comet, which has since been "shaking from its horrid hair pestilence and war."

Though the achievement of our independence was arduous, yet the principal labor was

the formation of a government, which would preserve our union and confidence. Happily for our republic, the hero who led our armies to independence, was the statesman who taught us how to value its blessings. So unparalleled a rise of national character and prosperity, was the effect of an administration impartial and energetic. And WASHINGTON seems to have been destined by Providence to exhibit to his successors, an example not only of defending, but of governing his country.

But while it is our duty on this anniversary, to commemorate the feelings and principles, which effected our revolution, the present alarming crisis commands us to impress them as essential to the preservation of our independence.— When we view military despotism spreading over the European continent, and the ambition of conquest compelling nations to resign their rights, or to fight for them, it becomes an anxious inquiry, how our liberty is to be protected. The policy of our government relies for its internal defence on the bravery and numbers of a patriotic militia; and it is honorable to us, that no nation so well unites in the citizen the qualities of civil and military life. But the history of war, has instructed us, that however a patriotic militia may display their bravery, they cannot re-

pel the organized attacks of regular forces, till they are drilled into discipline by continued disaster. We live in an age, which ridicules the doctrine, that reason and justice extend security to an unoffending nation. It is a doctrine contradicted by the cries of the suffering world.—Heroes have bled, republics have been prostrated in vain, if we are still to be taught, that to be respected we must be feared. The Chinese, unable to resist the aggressions of the Tartars, adopted the policy of incorporating them into the body of their empire. But for the honor of our country, let it not be said, that because we had not spirit to resist the encroachments of the Spaniards of Louisiana, we condescended to purchase their friendship and union ; and confer on them the blessings of our independence, which they knew not how to appreciate. Had the President signified a request, thousands of the brave yeomanry of New England would have traversed the states, for the purpose of teaching the Spaniards to respect our rights ; and that, as a satisfaction for the habitual violation of them, all the wild land of Louisiana would be rejected with disdain.

In a period like the present, when the belligerents in their mutual rage have disregarded the laws of nations, and are trespassing on neu-

tral ground, it would have been expected that our government would prepare some force, at least for observation. While we claim the maritime rights of an independent nation, and yet submit without resistance to be driven from the seas, can we this day boast much of our independence? Is it possible, that wherever the American flag is discovered, it is a signal for pursuit and aggression; and still all the resentment we can express, is by not suffering our vessels to adventure on the ocean? Have we been so expeditious in sinking to the lowest point of political insignificance, that foreign nations are permitted to forget that we have rights, which may be violated? Yes! that commerce, which has hitherto furnished the resources of our government, has been obliged to abandon the ocean; and for protection to depend on the partial fortification of our ports.—The fleet of Æneas was secured from the enemy by being transformed to sea-nymphs; but the age of prodigy is past; and American commerce left defenceless by the government, cannot expect the interposition of the Gods.

If the embargo be a measure merely of precaution, why is not revenge threatened for the injuries to our commerce? But, if it be the mode of expressing our resentment, how insignificant its effect; except that palsyng one, which it has

on the spirit and enterprize of our citizens !— While we aim the blow with this torpedo, before the stroke is inflicted, the public arm is benumbed and void of energy.

An independent nation disdains to hold its rights by sufferance. At a time when American commerce was as unrestricted as the ocean, the federal administration commenced a navy for its future protection. This force could exhibit no terrors to those, who recoil at the name of a standing army. Its station is on the deep ; and should a traitor direct its thunders, liberty could retire in safety to her mountains. This is the manner in which commerce would protect itself ; for it would demand from the treasury, but a small portion of the funds it there deposits. Had the present administration pursued the same system ; and while they received the profits, paid regard to the defence of our navigation, we should, before this time, have erected a navy, whose cannon would tell to foreigners the rights of the United States ; would have prevented the unauthorised violence on the Chesapeake ; or else have given some dignity and effect to our proclamations. Yet such is the unhappy prevalence of prejudice in the national council, that while our suffering and defenceless commerce was loudly upbraiding their neglect ; and the season of calamity was calculated to

impress with more force the lesson of wisdom, the proposition for a naval armament was overpowered by triumphant acclamations in favor of the embargo ! We have thus proclaimed to the world, that amid the greatest provocations and alarm, this will be the extent of our preparation, and the mode of our revenge. And tho they may deny us the glory of acting with national spirit, they cannot deny us the praise of suffering with humility. But we still anticipate the day, when our country will tear from her face the mask, in which she has been made to exhibit the features of pusillanimity ; when the winds, which now wave the oaks on our mountains, shall waft them on the ocean, to redeem the American character from disgrace : and by impressing foreign nations with respect for our power, compel them to recognise the rights of our independence.

As it is resolved that we shall have no commercial connection with the belligerent nations, let our country in her diplomatic negotiations, observe the duties of honest neutrality. While in the act of bowing in silent submission to the insolence of France, it answers no purpose to cast a haughty look at Great Britain. When we exhibit our spirit, let it be directed where there is cause of apprehension. The subject of our dread is that vortex, which is daily extending

its circles, and absorbing in Paris the spoils of Europe ; and which, by its attractive force, has already destroyed the cohesive union of our republic. If omens could alarm, Providence has exhibited ‘portentous signs importing change to states.’ We see Napoleon traverse the continent ; and neither mountains nor armies resist his progress.— He makes the tour of Europe, and scarcely passes the limits of his own dominions. To him, like death, the palaces of kings, and the cottages of the poor are equally accessible. But it was not want of resources ; it was the corrupt and temporising policy of Courts, which has lost the cause of Europe. The ancient Germans vanquished the legions of Augustus, and humbled the pride of Rome. But when the king of Prussia had it in his power, by one stroke to do justice to the violated rights of Europe, and mankind in the enthusiasm of hope believed his arm was uplifted ; what was the motive which arrested it ? The possession of Hanover, which France had no right to transfer ! The fate he received has satisfied the resentment of the world. Our administration also has been appeased by the apparent possession of a disputed territory ; and if we escape the same destiny, such is the will of Heaven, and not the disposition of the conqueror.

While Portugal was at liberty to pursue that commerce, which her situation rendered ne-

cessary, she made the greatest sacrifices to preserve her neutrality. In the last resort, she was as willing to discontinue her connection with England, as were the United States with the government of St. Domingo. But the pacificator of Europe, in testimony of his respect for the rights of peaceable neutrality, has driven the Portuguese court from their territory, and obliged them to take refuge on the ocean. Like the adventurous survivors of Troy, they fly terrified at the approach of this Polyphemus crimsoned with carnage ; and seek protection on that element, which happily for mankind, has hitherto arrested the progress of the giant.

With these instances in view we suffer France to violate our treaty at discretion ; with England we dare not ratify a treaty. The former, who is overwhelming the world with terror of her power, we behold with unthinking admiration ; and even exult in those victories, each of which quickens the march of tyranny over ourselves. In the latter, who is struggling for the existence of freedom, we feel no interest ; or calculate with triumph the probable period, when the pressure of her present sufferings will bow her neck to subjugation. Indeed, it would afford some satisfaction, if our country should prostrate herself without even the show of resistance, that England, whose fall will be glorious, will not be

able to raise her head from the dust, to upbraid us with our disgrace.

He, who has so soon become the sovereign of the continent, already begins to assume the temper of a sovereign of the earth. He addresses the ambassadors of his friends in the tone of command ; and treats his enemies as those who rebel against his authority. His conduct has declared plainer than language can express, that he will endure no neutrals ; and that too, under a persuasion, that we dare not become his enemy. If we are thus summoned to take our side in this momentous contest, which will in a few years determine the political destiny of the civilized world ; let the alternative be decided by the intelligence, the virtue and patriotism of the country. While the legislature are assembled for the common good, let the rays of executive information dwell equally on all ; unintercepted by any medium of prejudice ; not concentrated within a favorite circle ; or reflected as may suit the views of a party. Tho' diplomatic secrecy may require that the doors of congress should be closed, and the public mind be held in suspense, yet should the people have confidence, that in a body, where the constitution supposes the collective wisdom of the country resides, the measure adopted will be the impartial result of ingenuous communication and rational debate. Yet the patriotic GARDINIER, alarm-

ed at the effect of an invisible principle, which hurried Congress on to action, without deliberation, and was felt, but not explained ; as a representative of the people demands investigation. He entreats the legislature not to suffer themselves to be deluded by a secret agency to the precipice of destruction. The language of monition is answered by that of calumny ; and he who seconded the voice of the public, is reduced to the extremity of exposing his honor or his life. Tho' it was disgraceful in the time of Nero, yet in these days of intolerance it seems necessary to the safety of our senators, that they should also unite the character of gladiators.

Our country has principal cause to mourn, not that her commerce is prostrated, and thousands deprived of their support ; but that in this emergence public confidence is banished, and hope languishes without excitement. We hear the menace of approaching war ; but we look round in vain for preparation. The administration indeed describe the melancholy condition of our republic ; but the recital of our complaints produces not that temper, which when we were colonies, burst out in the tone of independence. It is rather calculated to quell the emotions of patriotism by motives of resignation, and appease hostility by philosophic endurance of distress.— Though the usual sources of our finance have

failed us, our administration had a treasury of national spirit, which nothing but voluntary humiliation could exhaust. And should our government even now raise itself to the attitude of resolution, and daring to meet the visage of the conqueror, address to him the determination of freemen, party discriminations would be forgotten, and those veterans whom Washington taught the "tactics of victory" would again protect the standard of our country from disgrace.

But we rejoice there is a "redeeming virtue" in the people, which, when they are deluded, suffers them not to be ruined. This reign of experiments has convinced them, that the national resources ought to be appropriated to the maintenance of the national character; that a former administration, which for this purpose in a period of alarm had recourse to direct taxation, was not less wise than the present, which neglecting other expedients, has imposed an embargo, the maximum of taxation, producing not a cent of revenue. The veil is withdrawn; and the people see inscribed on the walls of congress, characters, terrific as those which dismayed Belshazzar, but which it requires no second Daniel to interpret.

That power which they gave, they will soon resume; and by their suffrages, uninfluenced by

any sinister arrangement, will have an opportunity of recalling into their service the patriots, who achieved their liberties. Thus will they a second time acquire independence for their country. Those immunities which are now disregarded, will be enforced; that character which has been prostrated, will be exalted; and our country again ascend from the habit of colonial submission to the spirit and power of sovereignty.

Our republic is privileged by Heaven, in being the only one spared from the ravages of ambition; let it not fall by the hands of its own citizens. History presents the melancholy spectacle of those which once flourished; may we not read in the fragments of their ruins the prediction of our destiny. Americans have no common motives to interest them. The political sentiments they should espouse, are those of the savior of their country; and they are bound by gratitude and patriotism to respect them. Could we feel the obligation, posterity would imitate the example. Ages after this scene of things shall have vanished, future Americans would exclaim; our country was rescued by Washington, and we will defend it; the constitution of our fathers was raised by Washington, and we will support it; the administration of our government we will cherish, for it was the administra-

tion of Washington. And when time shall roll on its waves the wrecks of European kingdoms, our republic shall tower her head above the flood, as permanent and impregnable as Atlas.



NOTE. The lamented death of the Hon. FISHER AMES having been announced to the author a short time before the delivery of the Oration, and after his manuscript was prepared for the press; he noticed it in the fifteenth page, after the period ending, "*let the alternative be decided by the intelligence, the virtue and patriotism of the country,*" in the following manner. But alas! The immortal AMES, who, like ITHURIEL was commissioned to discover the insidious foe, and point out our danger, has like Ithuriel accomplished his embassy; and on this morning of our independence has ascended to heaven. Spirit of Demosthenes! Couldst thou have been a silent and invisible auditor, how wouldst thou have been delighted to hear from his lips, those strains of eloquence, which once from thine, enchanted the assemblies of Greece.

